

4 September 2006

I oppose uranium sales to China for the reasons outlined below.

As well as being concerned about the very serious risk that exported uranium will be involved in the production of China's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), I am deeply concerned about the environmental and social risks associated with mining and exporting uranium. As uranium sales increase the extent of mining in Australia will also expand. This cannot be tolerated. The existing mines are too dangerous and should be closed, more would be outrageous.

The environmental and social implications include:

- The destruction of sensitive eco-systems through use of massive quantities of water;
- Contribution to dangerous climate change through production of carbon dioxide from high electricity use;
- Dangers posed for thousands of years to nature and humanity alike by radioactive tailings;
- No Australian uranium mine has been accident free which poses an ongoing and substantial risk through radioactive exposure to our ecosystems and the health of all Australians
- There are inherent risks associated with transporting uranium, as there is risk of accident with any transport. This exposes the Australian public to risk of radiation exposure.

As an example, at 2006 levels of operation, the Roxby Downs/Olympic Dam uranium mine is licensed to take 40 million litres of water a day from the Great Artesian Basin (GAB). The GAB is a vast and ancient body of water that lies deep under the surface of central Australia. It begins in far north Queensland and is a source of water for many pastoral properties and habitats, including the fragile and unique mound springs in South Australia's arid north. Currently BHP Billiton extracts 33 million litres a day from the GAB and farmers, environmentalists and traditional owners have reported dramatic reductions in water pressure threatening and sometimes extinguishing rare ecosystems. Under the Indenture Act, BHP Billiton is not required to pay for this water or account for the damage it is doing.

The radioactive waste tailings dam at Olympic Dam amounts to 60 million tonnes and is growing at 10 million tonnes annually. The tailings dam has been plagued by spills – most significantly in 1994, when the mine operators admitted some five million cubic litres had leaked from the dams over two years. Environmental audits provided to the Rann Government continue to emphasise that the mine tailings are inadequately managed and “an issue of real concern” requiring “the implementation of urgent remedial measures” (Wiese Bockmann, M 2006, ‘Waste fears at uranium mine’, *The Australian*, 10 March 2006, p. 7). BHP Billiton has no long-term plans for the management of these tailings, which because of their radioactivity may remain dangerous for thousands of years. When all valuable resources have been extracted BHP Billiton simply plans to ‘cap’ the tailings dump with soil.

Additionally, Olympic Dam consumes more electricity than any other body in the State, ten percent of the state's production, effectively making it SA's single biggest producer of greenhouse gas. This impact will only increase with the mine's projected expansion. This has substantial consequences for South Australia's contribution to climate change, contrary to their commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050.

Tragically, the major safeguard in place to offer some protection to our environment does not apply to this mine. The Indenture Act provides an override to the *Environmental Protection Act 1993* (EPA) and the powers and functions contained within. The EPA was enacted to provide for the protection of the environment and the establishment of an Environmental Protection Authority to monitor and enforce compliance with the Act. The key objective of this legislation is the avoidance of ‘environmental harm’, a term that is defined in the legislation to

mean any harm or potential harm to the environment, of whatever degree or duration. Potential harm includes risk of harm and future harm.

In reviewing the conditions surrounding the massive 1994 leak, Dr. Gavin Mudd emphasises that the Indenture Act essentially prevents the mine from environmental responsibility and “until the [Indenture] Act is revoked entirely there can be no truly independent, external environmental assessment of the impacts of Olympic Dam”.

Uranium mining threatens our environment and our health, and the major legislation that offers protection against the destructiveness of one of the existing major mines is deemed not to apply. This is a sad sign of what we can expect from our government - a lack of care for the wellbeing of its citizens now and for the future. This makes me feel vulnerable, exposed and angry. This government owes it to myself, my children and my grandchildren of the future that we are protected from the risks inherent in uranium mining.

Yours truly,  
Melanie Szydzik